

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 14, 2017

The Honorable John Tahsuda III
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Tahsuda:

We are writing in follow up to a recent series by Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB) highlighting Chemawa Indian School in Salem, Oregon, and the significant allegations raised. OPB's investigation highlights serious concerns with the management, alleged abuse, lack of transparency, and fraud at the Chemawa Indian School.

Specifically, we have concerns with:

- Student safety and health, including an alarmingly high report of incidents in recent years requiring involvement from law enforcement;
- Academic failings and high fluctuations in enrollment from semester to semester, as well as debilitating staff turnover rates and vacancies;
- The staff's ability to report problems and concerns, and alleged retaliation against whistleblowers;
- Overall transparency from the school with regards to rules and regulations for leadership and decision making.

We support the school's mission to provide a high school education alongside an education in tribal heritage and vocational skills to Native American youth. It is our mission to ensure the safety and prosperity of the students entrusted to the school. We thank you for your attention to these questions and our concerns, and look forward to a swift response.

Sincerely,



KURT SCHRADER
Member of Congress



RON WYDEN
U.S. Senator



JEFFREY MERKLEY
U.S. Senator



PETER DeFAZIO
Member of Congress



EARL BLUMENAUER
Member of Congress



SUZANNE BONAMICI
Member of Congress

Oregon's Congressional Delegation Questions about the Chemawa Indian School

- How does Chemawa compare in funding levels per student to the three other boarding schools under BIE's jurisdiction?
- Local tribes are worried that students are not meeting academic standards. What are the benchmarks of success at Chemawa and what structures exist to help students be as successful as possible during their time at the school and after?
- Does the BIE hold educators at Chemawa to the same standards as educators across the Oregon public school system are held to by Teacher Standards and Practices Commission (TSPC)? If not, what are the requirements to become an educator at Chemawa, and what specific standards are educators at Chemawa held to?
- Students at Chemawa often come to the school from troubled circumstances – their own communities are unable to support them and Chemawa is often seen as a safer alternative for them. Local tribes are concerned that staff at the school are not equipped or willing to help these students adequately. What are the school's policies and procedures for training teachers and support staff to handle the mental health, behavioral, legal, and academic problems of these students? How does this compare to the three other boarding schools?
- Regarding concerns raised about the lack of safe avenues for staff to report issues and raise concerns with productive feedback and/or success:
 - What is the school's policy for reporting problems?
 - How does the administration intake such reports and address potential problems?
 - What policies does BIE have to protect whistleblowers?
 - Does BIE involve itself in the above, or is this entirely left to the school? And if so, how does this compare to the other three boarding schools?
- The devastating turnover rate at the administration level is particularly concerning – nine superintendents in 11 years, excluding short-term interim superintendents. This alarmingly high turnover creates an unstable leadership environment that impacts the school on every level:
 - How does this compare other schools and what is the cause for such high turnover?
 - What processes are in place to help transition incoming superintendents to ensure smooth transitions and retention?
- Transparency from the school and its governing structure has been under scrutiny for years. What are the policies and procedures around election of the school board and how the administration team is hired?